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ABSTRACT

The National Education Association (NEA) Project on Utilization of Inservice Education Research and Development Products is described, and the steps in the development of the project are presented, including: (1) location and screening of potential items for inclusion in the information bank (books, guides, films, modules, video-recordings, multimedia kits, audio recordings, programmed texts, and games and simulation); (2) development of standardized forms for describing the products; and (3) development of a retrieval system once the number of documents had grown substantially. (DS)

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HOW CAN WE MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT USE OF R&D PRODUCTS

For the last two and a half years, NIE has funded seven related field operations and an associated evaluation effort dealing with the use of R&D products in education. One of the studies has been conducted by the National Education Association and has dealt with the use of R&D products for inservice education.

Although the seven projects differ in a number of significant ways, they have certain common elements among which are:

1. Implementation of selected R&D products at local school district sites in the areas of basic skills, career education or bilingual education.

2. Application of a systematic problem solving process beginning with identification of an educational problem.

3. Delivering of technical assistance to local schools through the use of linking agents.

4. Development of appropriate strategies/tactics for interrelating the process, the products, and the linkages.

The NEA project differed significantly from the other six projects in three ways:

1. It was the only one of the seven which focused entirely on inservice education.

2. It was built on direct teacher involvement in the problem solving process from problem identification through the implementation.

3. It depended upon active, cooperative action of local teacher associations and local administrators, state teachers associations and state departments of education.

The NEA project involved 57 school districts(sites) in 12 states reaching from Massachusetts to California.

This report will deal with only one aspect of the project --the support services provided by the project staff to encourage

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effective and efficient use of R&D products for inservice education purposes.

The year prior to the NIE funded project, an NEA staff member on sabbatical had conducted a related pilot study. In this study it had been determined that there existed R&D products appropriate for inservice education of teachers. The pilot project had also investigated the nature of the information teachers wanted about R&D products in order to form valid judgments concerning their applicability to teacher identified teaching problems.

The first step was the location and screening of potential items for inclusion in the information bank. This turned out to be a difficult and time consuming process. In addition to resource directories, contact was made with educational labs, professional associations, publishing houses, universities and colleges, educational distributors, and government agencies. Frequently the original producer was not the distributor and, in some cases, there appeared to be no distributor at all for products that had been produced and field tested. Field test data was difficult to obtain, and distributors changed frequently as did the prices.

R&D products might be books/guides, films, modules, video-recordings, multimedia kits, audio recordings, programmed texts, games and simulation, and the like. Some were total inservice packages, that is including materials and procedures for the total inservice experience. Others were discrete items that the site had to build into a total inservice activity.

Once an R&D product that met the established criteria had been selected, it was then necessary to describe it following the teacher identified information requirements that had been discovered in the pilot project. Eight-page product descriptions were developed for each selected item, and these descriptions included the following headings:

1. Summary information (included title, publication date, intended users, grade levels, and so forth)

2. Purposes

3. Content--scope and sequency of topics

4. Activities and resources involved in the use of the product

5. Evaluation of teacher inservice learning

6. Ordering information

7. History of development

8. Describer critique

9. User evaluation

The describers were teachers or former teachers who were specifically trained for the describing activity. Their work was supervised by information specialists in the national project office.

As the project got underway in the fall of '76, there were about 60 completed descriptions in the information bank. By the end of the second year of the project, over 500 items had been described. It was soon learned that the problems identified by teachers were so diverse that the number and variety of product descriptions required was much greater than had been originally anticipated.

In the beginning, few of the product descriptions had information about users' comments. One of the requirements of the project, however, was that teachers who selected a product for use were to complete an evaluation form. Data from these instruments were combined in the national office and added to the product descriptions so as to be available to future teachers who might be considering the product, as well as to the producers and distributors of the product.

As the number of descriptions increased, it became more necessary to organize the descriptions in a way that would facilitate retrieval related to specific teacher identified problems. Based on user needs, certain subtopics were derived related to the basic skills areas. These were such topics as motivation, multicultural-bilingual, special education, individualized instruction, classroom management, early childhood and teaching strategies. As the information bank increased in size, a needle-sort system was put into place which facilitated the matching of user criteria (such as problem topic, grade level, time available, equipment available and the like) with the R&D product descriptions.

Two information specialists were employed on the national project staff and located in the office in Washington, D. C. Among the duties of these information specialists were the

locating and screening of the products, the supervision of preparation of the product descriptions, the collation of user critiques, and the matching of teacher requests with product descriptions.

Connecting the information specialists who manned the data bank and the teacher users in the field was an 800 toll-free number. Before teachers in the project utilized the number, however, they were to have conducted a needs assessment at the site and to have conducted an adequate problem statement and criteria for the selection of R&D products. Having done this a teacher, usually speaking for a group of teachers with a common problem, called the 800 number and conversed with one of the information specialists who recorded information about the problem, the grade level, the number of teachers and other pertinent information on a form. She then, within a 24 hour period, collected descriptions of R&D products in the bank which met the criteria of the caller and sent these to the site for their inspection. There was no limit on the number of times a user could call the 800 number. In other words, if they were not satisfied with the first call, they could repeat the process, giving more specific information about their needs; thus, likes and dislikes of the R&D product descriptions could be received.

Products were not available from the project office, only the descriptions of R&D products. It was up to the local site to obtain the product, using the information for ordering that appeared on the product description. In the latter part of the project, the 800 number was announced through state association publications to all teachers or teacher education personnel. Currently, as many or more calls are coming from non-project sources as from project related sources.

Teacher evaluations of specific R&D Products are now coming in, but some general opinions are evident. First, most of the teachers or groups of teachers did find useful and helpful inservice materials which aided them in alleviating identified problems. Some of the materials were selected for use by individual teachers; some by groups of teachers such as the faculty in a school, the faculty in the math department, and the like; and, in some cases, materials were selected for a total school system faculty. The last, however, seemed to be the least successful type of R&D product use.

There were problems that were discouraging to some teachers. There seemed to be very few products suitable for the secondary school level. Also, the teachers reported that many of the products listed as useful for inservice education were really designed for preservice. Teachers said that many products were more of the "college course" type, emphasizing theory rather than practical classroom applications. Some materials required more outside consultant service or more time than was available at the site. There were delays in delivery of ordered products and frustrating changes in distributors and prices of products.

One interesting problem developed early, and that related to how the teachers in the project defined inservice education. They distinguished between curriculum development activities and inservice education. Inservice to them was aimed toward alleviation of specific classroom teaching problems existing at that time in their classroom.

Teachers today are under a great amount of stress and pressure from the public in general, from parents and from their own perceived inability to deal adequately with the "new student" that they are facing today in their classrooms. For this reason they are desperately searching for materials and techniques that may have immediate application to classroom problems. Too few of these types of materials exist for inservice purposes.

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